

DRUŠTVENE INOVACIJE U PROCESU EKONOMSKE INTEGRACIJE - ODABRANI APSEKTI-

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION PROCESS - SELECTED ASPECTS -

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Summary

The following article touches upon the role of social innovations seen as a catalyst for social and economic change, which is supposed to favor achieving a high degree of economic convergence, in a gradual elimination of developmental differences. A special attention has been paid to the territorial context of creating 'innovative climate' and the globalization context of innovation both as a source of positive change as well as a reason for tension related to diversifying developmental potentials.

Modern-day economic development tends to concentrate on non-material resources including especially knowledge, technology and all varieties of innovations. The search for possibilities of meeting various social needs requires a certain combination of resources so that they are effectively used and competitive advantages are easily identified. A key issue is not only looking for the latest technological advances but also such social changes that will become a catalyst for development and will bring on positive effects in terms of an increase in society's well-being as well as contribute to solving many a social issue which are of interest to social politics.

Traditionally, the perception of innovation focused on its technical side. While on the subject of innovations, one thought mainly of new products, processes or technologies, less frequently of organization. These days social innovations are more and more often perceived as a phenomenon or process which constitutes a total sum of social changes that are indicators of progress and modernization. These changes in a synergetic manner complete and interdepend on the process of technological changes. Social changes can give a new shape to labor market (including new forms of employment such as home office), can create new types of social bonds, e.g. generating social network society, and can streamline the processes of management and interpersonal communication. However, these changes can also lead to controversial social issues that interfere with human culture such as in vitro fertilization, homosexuality and manipulating human's biological sphere. The essence of innovation is inventiveness that promotes changes and progress, but it needs to be stressed that not every innovation brings benefits for human beings. That primarily depends on making man the focal point of the innovation process. As A. Nowakowska rightly states the need for inventing new concepts and innovative ideas requires more intellectual powers, wider knowledge and creativity. As in many evolutionary processes, here one can observe

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a self-driven, cumulative process of changes which eventually resulted in crediting knowledge and innovation with a reputation of an independent and elementary productive factor. Consequently, modern-day economy is called an economy based on knowledge, where 'soft' factors have become the main driving force behind the socio-economic development'. A prerequisite for innovation to take place is the existence of a knowledge of specific 'gravity, then one can speak of forming 'innovation environment'. Innovation environment, according to D. Maillat, is a territorial entity from which the innovation process stems. There must be a definite type of interaction between economic subjects, public authorities and social sphere, which brings about certain external results. Characteristics of innovation environment include: specific territorial boundaries viewed as the effect of collective processes of interaction, learning and adaptation –a collective product of the socio-economic sphere along with its organizational structure which facilitates the circulation of knowledge around the social network system, institutional and individual forms of activity and social mobility; learning dynamics illustrated by abilities and willingness on the part of all participants of the development process to make rapid changes and react to environmental dynamics and, consequently, suitably adjust their own actions to those requirements. Needless to say, a crucial background as well as a generator of all sorts of innovation are growing globalization processes. Globalization itself can be described as: 'an ongoing long-term process of integration between an increasing number of national economies regardless of their borders, which takes place thanks to expanding and intensifying mutual connections (in investment, production, trade and cooperation areas). As a result, a worldwide economic system is emerging. This system is characterized by significant interdependence and considerable repercussions affecting even faraway countries. While describing the phenomenon of globalization, it is necessary to highlight the significance of liberalization of the world's economy, strengthening international connections, facilitation in the exchange of goods, services, capital, technology and decreasing freight costs. It must also be mentioned that the liberalization of economy brings about certain social costs that could be called 'modernization costs' or 'adaptation costs'. Globalization not only enforced innovation processes, but also led to re-defining a nation-state into the one that fulfils a variety of social functions.

Keywords: social innovations, convergence, territory, globalization
